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# meat & poultry inspection:

## *A capsule summary*

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture helps consumers and industry through a comprehensive meat and poultry inspection program.

- Inspects for wholesomeness all meat and poultry products produced by plants selling across State lines or to other countries.
- Inspects all meat and poultry products produced by plants in States which do not have certified, equal-to-Federal inspection programs of their own.
- Periodically reviews State programs that have been certified equal, to see that satisfactory inspection is maintained.
- Reviews foreign inspection systems and packing plants which export meat and poultry to this country, then reinspects imported products at U.S. ports of entry.
- Checks plant facilities and equipment, sanitation, slaughter and processing methods, containers and labeling.

Inspection is marked by expanding Federal and State cooperation.

- Most States now conduct their own inspection programs, based on Federal guidelines, for plants that sell within the State boundaries.
- State and Federal inspection programs are sharing data, facilities, and manpower resources to fulfill respective consumer protection responsibilities more efficiently.
- Federal government shares the cost of State inspection programs and offers technical, laboratory and training aid.

Inspection occurs at various points in the marketing process. One product may be inspected numerous times.

- Before slaughter
- After slaughter
- During processing, packaging and labeling

Federal inspection program is growing. At the beginning of 1971,\*

- About 6,940 food inspectors and veterinarians and 1,705 management, laboratory and other support personnel worked in the USDA meat and poultry inspection programs.
- 2,798 meat plants, 590 poultry plants and 590 combination meat and poultry plants were under Federal inspection.

Under the watchful eyes of USDA inspectors, wholesome meat and poultry reach our Nation's homes. In 1970,

- USDA inspected more than 3 billion birds and 118 million meat animals and, during later processing, more than 15 billion pounds of processed poultry products, and more than 52 billion pounds of processed meat products.
- Federal inspectors condemned 106 million poultry and 427,000 meat animals, 107,000 pounds of poultry parts and 6 million parts of meat animals, 22 million pounds of processed poultry products, and 37 million pounds of processed meat products.
- As a "second line of defense" against unfit products in marketing channels, USDA compliance officers detained nearly 11.2 million pounds of "suspect" meat and poultry in some 665 actions. The aim is to prevent fraudulent or illegal practices once the product has left the processing plant. Compliance officers check for uninspected meat or poultry, counterfeit inspection stamps and inaccurate labels, and contamination or spoilage of products after leaving the plant.

Imported meat and poultry must meet same standards as domestic ones.

- A foreign country's inspection laws, regulations, procedures, administration and operations must first meet U.S. standards; USDA then approves the overall program. Individual plants within that country then apply to their own government for certification to export to the United States.
- Each certified plant is subject to continuous inspection by inspectors of the foreign country's government. During 1970, more than 9,400 such inspectors were working in plants exporting meat and poultry products to the U.S.
- Certified plants are visited at least once a year by a U.S. foreign review officer to see that they are operating in accordance with approved procedures. Steps are underway to carry out a minimum of 4 visits a year to major exporting plants and 2 visits a year to other exporting plants.

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\* All figures in this fact sheet are based on calendar year.



- Imported meat and poultry products are reinspected as they arrive in this country. They must bear prominent marking as to their country of origin.
- At the end of 1970, 977 foreign plants were authorized to export meat and meat products to the United States. More than 1.8 billion pounds of their products were passed for entry into this country during 1970, while more than 21 million pounds were refused entry and/or condemned.

An epidemiology unit in USDA's Consumer and Marketing Service traces causes of food-borne hazards involving meat and poultry.

- Works with local, State, and Federal public health agencies to control food poisoning outbreaks by speeding identification of products responsible for human health hazards.
- Has found the major cause to be improper handling of products at the institution, restaurant, or home level during preparation for serving. Some examples of improper handling:
  - \* Inadequate cooking, especially of pork.
  - \* Storage at warm, "median" temperatures which allow bacterial and other organisms to multiply rapidly.
  - \* Failure to keep raw and cooked products separate during preparation.
  - \* Contamination by human carriers of bacteria.
  - \* Poor sanitation practices.
- Has found that perfringens, salmonella, staphylococcus and trichina poisonings result from improper handling.

Monitoring program checks against meat and poultry containing drug, pesticide, and chemical residues.

- Monitors both domestic and imported meat and poultry production for possible residues.
- Samples animals, flocks, and herds suspected of illegal residues.
- Alerts drug and pesticide enforcement agencies when violations are found.
- Condemned 4.5 million pounds of meat and poultry containing illegal residues in 1970.

Additives--ingredients aimed at improving physical qualities such as flavor, color and shelf-life of a product--must be approved by C&MS before use in inspected meat and poultry products. C&MS sees that additives used:

- are approved by Food and Drug Administration and are limited to specified amounts.
- meet a specific, justifiable need in the product.
- do not promote deception as to product freshness, quality, weight or size. Paprika, for example, is not permitted in fresh meat, since its red color can make raw meat look leaner and fresher than it is.
- are truthfully and properly listed on the product label.

Labels help consumers know what they're paying for.

- Labels on all inspected products must be approved by USDA.
- Labels must contain accurate product name; list of ingredients; name and place of business of packer, manufacturer or person for whom product is prepared; statement of quantity; mark of Federal inspection.
- In 1970, more than 103,000 different label designs for meat and poultry products were reviewed and approved. Some 6,500 other labels which did not give accurate statement of package contents were rejected.

To be labeled with a particular name, a Federally-inspected meat or poultry product must be approved as meeting specific product requirements. Standards are set by USDA so consumers will get what they expect when they shop.

- "Beef with Gravy" must contain at least 50% beef (cooked basis), while the minimum meat content for "Gravy with Beef" is 35% beef (cooked basis).
- "Ham Salad" must contain at least 35% ham (cooked basis).
- "Hot dogs" and "bologna" are limited to 30% fat.
- "Chicken Soup" must have at least 2% chicken meat (cooked, deboned basis).
- "Turkey Pot Pie" must contain at least 14% turkey meat (cooked, deboned basis).

Consumers participate in setting standards.

- When new or revised standards and labeling rules are being considered, USDA makes this information available to news outlets. Consumers watch for such items, then let USDA know their views.